

Dragonshards Monastic Orders

By Keith Baker



Most of the religions presented in the *Eberron Campaign Setting* maintain monastic communities, where the faithful live ascetic lives of contemplation and honor the gods with their prayers and works. Many of the religious texts of Eberron are produced in such monasteries, and relics of the faithful are hidden away in monastic vaults. The majority of these devotees are experts who are trained in Knowledge, Craft, and Speak Language; Sense Motive, Diplomacy, Heal, and Forgery are also common.

But "monk" has a second meaning: an ascetic who devotes her life to physical and mental discipline. Religious monks make a spiritual devotion of physical perfection, chastising the body through harsh exercise. These monks are champions of the faith who rely on martial skill instead of the divine magic of the cleric.

Not all monastic orders are religious in nature. The goblin sharaat'khes and Valenar Jaeldira pursue martial perfection for its own sake. These monks are swift and deadly warriors -- assassins who slip through the night and swordsmen who dance across the battlefield.

Many monastic orders exist, from the Mironites of the Silver Flame to the Tashalatora of Adar. This article examines three different traditions: The Order of the Broken Blade, the Flayed Hand, and the sharaat'khes.

The Order of the Broken Blade

"Lord of strength and steel, guide my hand!"

The name of this order is drawn from the legend of Kalan Desh, a devotee of Dol Dorn who ventured into the Byeshk foothills to rescue a kidnapped child. Three ogres attacked Kalan -- they sundered his sword and mocked him. Kalan called on Dol Dorn for guidance, and miraculously he slew the ogres with only his hands, feet, and the hilt of his shattered sword. In gratitude, he founded the first monastery of the Broken Blade, where others might honor Dol Dorn and master war in all its forms.

Dol Dorn stands between his honorable sister Dol Arrah and the treacherous Mockery, patron of assassins. He may inspire any combatant who relies on skill instead of deceit. For a Broken Blade monk, combat is both meditation and art -- a monk finds union with Dol Dorn through battle. After attaining the rank of swordbrother, a Broken Blade monk wanders the world. While many of these monks protect the weak and innocent, others join in any struggle they find. Occasionally, Broken Blades may fight on both sides of the same battle. The ultimate goal is to attain enlightenment through conflict, and the cause of the battle and the consequences of its outcome are a secondary concern.

Organization: The majority of the inhabitants of a Broken Blade monastery are initiates. After passing grueling mental, physical, and doctrinal tests, an initiate is granted the title of swordbrother (or sister). If he masters body and blade, a swordbrother can return and claim the title of blademaster. The blademasters instruct the initiates and manage the monastery under the direction of the abbot.

Initiates are typically 1st-level monks. Traditionally, a swordbrother must possess Whirling Steel Strike and at least 5 ranks of Knowledge (religion); however, in a campaign where PCs start at first level, the DM may wish to grant a player the honorary status of swordbrother to justify his wandering. There is no level-based prerequisite for the rank of blademaster; claiming such a position is a matter of devotion and skill, requiring the judgment of the other blademasters and the abbot.

The Karrnathi line of House Deneith has a close relationship with the Order of the Broken Blade, and a number of distinguished swordbrothers are among the Blademark and the sentinel marshals.

Monasteries: The primary monasteries of the Order of the Broken Blade are located in Karrlakton (Karrnath), Rekkenmark (Karrnath), and Starilaskur (Breland). Smaller monasteries are scattered across the Five Kingdoms, and the order has recently established an outpost in Kront Peak (Mror Holds). Broken Blade monasteries are austere, fortified buildings. Every monastery contains a forge; to attain the rank of blademaster, a monk must forge his own sword.

Character Development: Monks of the Broken Blade divide their character levels between fighter and monk, combining monastic discipline with swordsmanship. This dual discipline requires the use of the Monastic Training feat, which is described in the *Eberron Campaign Setting*. Monks are also encouraged to learn the following feats: Improved Critical (longsword), Weapon Focus (longsword), and Whirling Steel Strike. Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Disarm, and Quick Draw are also common disciplines. Broken Blade training emphasizes physical skills such as Balance, Jump, and Tumble.

The Flayed Hand

"Embrace the path of pain."

The Mockery is the lord of pain and vengeance -- the deceiver who destroys. His monks embrace suffering; through ritual torture, they overcome weakness of body and mind. As part of this training, a monk flays strips of her skin, treating the muscle below with an alchemical substance that toughens it. This excruciating torment permanently marks the monk as a follower of the Mockery.

Once an initiate has learned to endure pain, she is taught to inflict it. The monks of the Flayed Hand are master torturers and deadly warriors. A monk of the Mockery seeks communion with her god through violence and treachery. Many members of the order sell their services as mercenaries and assassins. Others cause pain in more subtle ways by destroying hopes and dreams instead of spilling blood.

The Flayed Hand is a secretive order, and a student of the Flayed Hand usually conceals her devotional scars. A monk dressed for battle is a grisly sight; the members of the order keep scraps of their victims' skin and craft their battle-robos from the flesh of the fallen. Some say that the masters of the order know how to capture a victim's knowledge in his skin, or to craft leather masks that allow a monk to adopt the appearance of her victim. Any priest of the Sovereign Host or Dark Six automatically recognizes the significance of the marks of the Mockery; other characters can make a successful DC 15 Knowledge (religion) check or bardic knowledge check (DC 20) to see if they have heard of the Flayed Hand.

Organization: Three ranks exist within the Flayed Hand, and all monks of a particular rank are considered equals. The lowest level is that of the initiate, who is still studying the mysteries and earning the marks of the Mockery. Once a monk survives the flaying and masters the arts of pain, she has earned the rank of excoriate.

An excoriate who settles in a monastery is known as an archimandrite.

Initiates are typically 1st-level monks. Excoriates are generally distinguished by possession of the Flensing Strike feat, but a PC who chooses to follow the path of the Mockery (a somewhat disturbing choice) may have earned the title of excoriate at 1st level.

Monasteries: The primary monasteries of the Flayed Hand are located in the Great Crag (Droaam) and Rukhaan Draal (Darguun). In other lands, the monasteries of the Mockery are small and carefully disguised, and the archimandrites are always prepared to evacuate on a moment's notice.

Character Development: Followers of the Flayed Hand put great emphasis on stealth, and many become assassins at 6th level or above. While it is not a class skill, Disguise is very important to Flayed Hand monks, both for subterfuge and to conceal the marks of the Mockery. The trademark feat of the order is Flensing Strike, which requires Weapon Focus (kama). Other traditional feats include Stunning Fist, Two-Weapon Fighting, Dodge, Combat Expertise, and Improved Trip.

A Flayed Hand monk adds Intimidate to her list of class skills. However, while her devotional marks are visible, she suffers a -2 circumstance penalty on Diplomacy or Gather Information checks.

The Shaarat'khes

"Even the smallest blade can slit a throat."

"Shaarat'khes" is a Goblin word that translates to "silent knives." The shaarat'khes are an order of goblin spies and assassins. This order can trace its roots back to the ancient Dhakaani empire. At the height of the empire, the shaarat'khes served as the hand of the emperor, bringing silent death to traitors and criminals. Once the empire fell, the shaarat'khes became mercenaries, selling their services to any warlord with gold. As the Dhakaani age came to an end, the Silent Master called upon the shaarat'khes to withdraw into the depths of their mountain fortress, leaving the remaining warlords to squabble over the ruins.

Now, thousands of years later, the Heirs of Dhakaan have reemerged -- and the shaarat'khes have returned with them. For the past century the goblins have been studying the nations of modern Khorvaire, moving among city goblins and establishing safehouses across the land. All of the clan lords rely on the shaarat'khes for information, and many have sought to win the allegiance of the assassins. But the Silent Master has maintained a position of neutrality. The shaarat'khes are the servants of the empire. But until the clans unanimously agree on an emperor, the silent knives treat all clans equally and demand payment in gold. The shaarat'khes do not accept every contract; as a rule they do not assassinate Dhakaani clan leaders or dirge singers. But once the silent knives take an assignment, they see it through to the end, even if this means fighting other members of the shaarat'khes. It is this impartiality and dedication that has allowed the clan to survive amid the warring heirs.

The Dhakaani are an agnostic people, and the shaarat'khes have little interest in gods or arcane mysteries. A goblin initiate seeks to become the perfect living weapon: swift, silent, equally deadly with fist and blade, whose focused mind can overcome any weakness of the body. While he may feign emotions when it serves his cause, a silent knife is cold and calm, and he always remains focused on his next task.

As a general rule, a goblin must be born into the clan of the shaarat'khes to learn the ways of the order. However, exceptional goblins have been adopted by the clan, and they even have a few members of other races -- most notably changelings.

All Dhakaani goblinoids know of the shaarat'khash. Other characters must make a successful bardic knowledge or DC 25 Knowledge (history) to see whether they have heard of the order.

Organization: A student of the silent arts carries the title of shaarul (*dull blade*). Upon completion of his training, the monk takes the title of tar'khash (*silent hand*) or il'khash (*silent eye*), depending on whether his primary focus is combat or espionage. Monks with assassin levels are known as mula'duur (*bringers of sorrow*). Clan decisions are made by a council of elders; the leader of this council holds the title of guula'khash (*silent master*).

Shaaruls are generally 1st-level monks. To attain the title of tar'khash or il'khash, a character must be a 2nd-level monk or 1st-level monk/1st-level rogue with 5 ranks of Hide and Move Silently.

Monasteries: The il'khash have spread across Khorvair over the past century, and the silent knives have eyes hidden in many of the great cities of the Five Nations. Any city with a significant goblin population may contain a shaarat'khash safehouse. However, only one true monastery exists: the fortress hidden deep in the Seawall Mountains, home to both the monks of the shaarat'khash and the noncombatant members of the clan.

Character Development: The majority of the shaarat'khash divide their character levels between rogue and monk, using the Monastic Training feat. Others follow the pure monastic path until 6th level, when they can become assassins (provided they meet the prerequisites). The shaarat'khash rely on speed and stealth, using surprise to strike an opponent with devastating sneak attacks. Traditional feats include the following: Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Feint, Monastic Training (Rogue), Skill Focus (Bluff), and Stunning Fist. Monastic skill training focuses on Hide, Move Silently, and Tumble; Bluff, Disguise, and Gather Information are also considered to be important talents.

Knowledge (local) and Knowledge (history) are class skills for shaarat'khash monks. These take the place of Knowledge (arcana) and Knowledge (religion).

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of **Eberron** to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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